Global Research:
The Great Work Study

The primary source of the five skills discussed in Great Work, the book.

Designed to help define "great work" and test the hypothesis that there are specific skills that anyone can practice to increase the odds of producing great work that others love.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Great Work study was the primary source of the five skills discussed in Great Work, the book. This study, which began in early 2010, was designed by members and partners of the O.C. Tanner Institute to help define "great work" and test the hypothesis that there are specific skills that anyone can practice to increase the odds of producing great work that others love.

The Great Work study focused specifically on actions that led to great work, rather than using the traditional approach of looking at personality traits of high achievers. The Great Work study combined four disparate yet complementary research components: The Executive Omnibus Survey, The O.C. Tanner Study of Award-Winning Work, The Forbes Insights Survey, and One-on-One Interviews.

Additional research and findings can be found in the book: *Great Work: How to Make a Difference People Love* and at greatwork.com.

THE EXECUTIVE OMNIBUS SURVEY

The Executive Omnibus Survey asked a diverse group of Harris Panel participants—302 senior executives from Fortune 100 companies—to provide their perspectives on great work and give examples of great work in their organizations. Executives were asked: "When you think about great work in your organization, what comes to mind?"

They responded with top-of-mind open-ended comments that fell naturally into two categories.

The first was focused on "great work" the noun, or outcomes such as client satisfaction, product excellence, innovation, new product development, strategy execution, revenue growth, and profits. The second focused on "great work" as a verb, or how work is accomplished through teamwork, collaboration, communication, commitment, vision, passion, ownership, integrity, trust, planning, and ethics.

Another question asked was, "Describe a project that represents great work to you." Here is a sample of the executives' responses:

"We had a product developed many years ago that was underutilized. We modified it slightly and very quickly in response to a market need and have seen use and demand explode."

"Our company needed a way to track ROI. Someone built the systems and got buy-in to implement them. Now all projects have an ROI and a way for managers to track progress."

"Our service manager recognized an urgent customer need and organized multiple employees to pull together and surpass customer expectations."

"An employee figured out a way to speed up the processing of invoices. Invoices were manually paid, but the employee suggested an imaging system, which produced faster processing of invoices."

"We came up with the idea for a new business line, took it to the top of the corporate ladder for approval, and then implemented the idea throughout the country at various levels. This new line helped our division to achieve the greatest growth rate in the history of the division."

"An employee developed a tool that beat all reporting capabilities of our standard ERP system. The interesting part is that no one asked him to do it or even looked into the possibility of developing something of that caliber."

"We have had some great contributions by new staff members creating models and procedures redefining how we approach our business and clients. I've been very impressed by their energy and expertise."

"Someone developed a database that looked at customer spending behaviors and used that to identify opportunities to introduce them to new retailers. This generated new business for the retailers and a revenue stream for the company."

"We needed to improve sales lead generation. We created an improved process that increased the number of leads by 480 percent while maintaining lead quality above 60 percent."

"A colleague took on tasks beyond her responsibility to get a project moving in the right direction, then managed to transition responsibilities to the proper owner."

"A peer recently assisted our organization in entering a specific vertical that we had never sold to. She created a business plan and sold the opportunity to the board of directors. It has since turned into one of the largest verticals in our organization."

"Our supply chain organization identified the opportunity to save several million dollars in transportation costs by shifting the location of inventory."

THE O.C. TANNER STUDY OF AWARD-WINNING WORK

The most far-reaching component of the Great Work study was the analysis of 1.7 million instances of award-winning work in corporations worldwide. In all, samples of 10,000 accounts of award winning work were examined.

These accounts came in the form of electronic nominations, written by supervisors or colleagues to describe what a person did to be deserving of a corporate award. Nominations averaged about 80 words in length. An initial sample was analyzed and coded into categories.

These samples helped to focus on 19 variables of great work. To avoid subjectivity, two independent teams coded a final set of nominations from a uniform coding book with expanded definitions of the 19 most promising variables. The two coding efforts were then compared to ensure similarity of results. The average similarity of coding decisions was 80 percent between the two groups, a high level of intercoder reliability for such an exercise.

This nomination is as an example of a great work description as it might have been coded for the study:

Nomination for "Jane Doe":
Jane was made aware of a problem in our order entry system that was causing random customer orders to fail. In spite of all the other work on her plate, she decided to fix the problem.
Jane dove right in and pulled together a cross functional team from several different departments. She spent many hours analyzing log files and assessing the root cause. In addition to fixing the core issues, she and her team added a simple up-sell feature. Since the fix, order entries have returned to normal and the up-sell feature generated $15,000 in new revenue last month. I recommend that Jane receive a Gold Award for this accomplishment.

Sample Code:
-Initiative
-Connect with others
-Sacrifice made
-Combine new elements
-Unexpected result

The following is a description of the research analysis method from Dr. Trent Kaufman and Lawrence Cowan of the Cicero Group, who ran a detailed analysis of the coded data.

The objective with the Great Work data set was to identify observed employee characteristics and traits that increase the chances (odds) an employee will produce great work. The Great Work data set included dichotomous response variables, meaning the dependent variable (or response) was coded "1" when the characteristic was observed, and "0" when the characteristic was not observed. The use of dichotomous response variables is commonplace in the social sciences (for example, "employed" vs. "unemployed," "married" vs. "unmarried,"
"voted" vs. "didn't vote").

In the Great Work data set, response variables described aspects of an employee's observed outcome or the result of the work that was done, such as "made a financial impact," "had effect on others," etc.

Similarly, predictor variables described an employee's observed actions or causes of the result, such as "talked to their outer circle," "saw for themselves," etc.

The data was studied using a type of regression analysis known as a logit model (logit models were developed specifically for predicting outcomes of dichotomous response variables). The read-out from a logit model provides a measurement of the "odds" of an event occurring (similar to a probability).

The odds of an event is simply the ratio of the expected number of times an event will occur to the expected number of times it will not occur. For example, an odds of 3 means we can expect 3 times as many occurrences of the event as non-occurrences, where an odds of 1/4 means that we expect only one-fourth as many occurrences as non-occurrences.

With the Great Work data set, all coded "predictor = response" variables were tested as individual models. The data set included 5 response variables and 13 predictor variables, which produced 60 individual models. Of those models, 46 produced a statistically significant relationship between predictor and response variables with odds ratios ranging from 17.13 to 1.64. The most extreme case (17.13) can be explained as follows: An odds ratio of 17.13 informs us that the model predicts the odds of an employee having the "Passion" result (response variable) are 17.13 times higher for employees who have done the "See" action (predictor variable) than they are for employees who didn't do the "See" action.

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
Ask the right question	Affects multiple people	4.12X
Ask the right question	Deemed important	3.13
Ask the right question	Creates passion	2.79
Ask the right question	Financial impact	2.69
Ask the right question	Unexpected positive	2.69

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
See for yourself	Creates passion	17.13X
See for yourself	Positive emotion	11.80
See for yourself	Deemed important	3.60
See for yourself	Financial impact	3.57
See for yourself	Affects multiple people	2.42

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
Talk to your outer circle	Financial impact	3.37X
Talk to your outer circle	Positive emotion	2.45
Talk to your outer circle	Affects multiple people	2.04

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
Improve the mix	Deemed important	3.17X
Improve the mix	FInancial impact	2.78
Improve the mix	Affects multiple people	2.10
Improve the mix	Positive emotion	1.75

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
Deliver the difference	Deemed important	3.77X
Deliver the difference	Affects multiple people	3.18
Deliver the difference	FInancial impact	1.99

The Great Work data set was analyzed in several different ways. But one of the more interesting questions asked was, "What happens to the odds of creating a result if two or more of the skills are present?" To answer this question, researchers looked at cases where more than one predictor variable (action) worked together and measured the combined effect on response variables (results). These are some of the select findings.

SELECTED FINDINGS

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
Ask the right question Talk to your outer circle Deliver the difference	Financial impact	2.95X
Ask the right question Talk to your outer circle Improve the mix	Financial impact	4.32
Ask the right question Talk to your outer circle Improve the mix Deliver the difference	Financial impact	4.74

Predictor Variable (ACTION)	Response Variable (RESULT)	Odds Ratio (LIKELIHOOD)
Ask the right question Talk to your outer circle Improve the mix	Deemed Important	6.54X
See for yourself Deliver the difference	Deemed Important	6.68
See for yourself Talk to your outer circle Improve the mix Deliver the difference	Deemed Important	10.53

Overall, the Great Work data set helped deepen the understanding what the five most important skills that affect great work are, and how the skills work together. The previous charts illustrate that an employee is nearly five times more likely to affect bottom-line financial results if he or she is using the ask, talk, improve, and deliver skills together. Likewise, an employee is ten-and-a-half times more likely to do work that others consider important when he or she uses the see, talk, improve, and deliver skills in combination.

THE FORBES INSIGHTS SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

This survey focused on recent projects for hundreds of organizations in dozens of industries all over the world. Forbes asked 1,013 "employees," "supervisors," and "beneficiaries" to answer questions about specific projects delivered in the previous three months. The goal was to add clarity to an understanding of "great work" and to gather input about what causes it from a variety of relevant points of view.

The research also sought to discover new insights that would validate (or invalidate) the five skills that were emerging from the O.C. Tanner Study of Award-Winning Work by varying the skill definitions and testing them alongside other potential predictors of great work.

Each survey asked participants to describe a recent project and rate its level of success from "far below expectations" to "far exceeds expectations." Projects were categorized as those that "exceeded expectations" as great work, projects that "met expectations" as good work, and projects that "did not meet expectations" as poor work.

Through several pilot studies, survey questions were considered that described each of the five skills. Statistical analysis narrowed down the list to a handful of survey questions that consistently and reliably described each of the five skills.

While the survey sought to clarify which skills were present when great work was achieved, it was also designed to highlight the degree to which those same skills were present during instances of good and poor work. Examples:

1. Ask the right question. Two forms of asking what people would love showed up strongly in the questionnaires among employees: "I thought carefully about what would really make a difference" and "I gave a lot of thought to what outcome would delight the recipient of the work."

2. See for yourself. The importance of looking to understand the work from the recipient's point of view came on strong here, as both beneficiaries and employees noted the value of "seeing from the vantage of those who receive the work."

3. Talk to your outer circle. The value of connecting "outside of one's regular team for insights," performed particularly strongly among beneficiaries of the work.

4. Improve the mix. Two ideas that led to the skill called "Improve the Mix" were prevalent in the study. "I continued to shape my ideas and efforts until I felt they were right" and "I experimented with new techniques, strategies, and processes" both had a strong showing across all parties involved.

5. Deliver the difference. "I remained involved and engaged as the work product was delivered and implemented" scored only slightly higher than, "I felt a continued sense of ownership in the work as it was rolled out."

CASE STUDIES AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In addition to the survey, Forbes Insights also conducted 360-degree interviews with "employees," "supervisors," and "beneficiaries" to showcase great work in action in four specific industries: automotive, publishing, high technology, and public relations. Business mogul Donald Trump, for example, offered Forbes Insights this definition: "Great work," he said, "implies going beyond what is expected and producing the unexpected."

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION

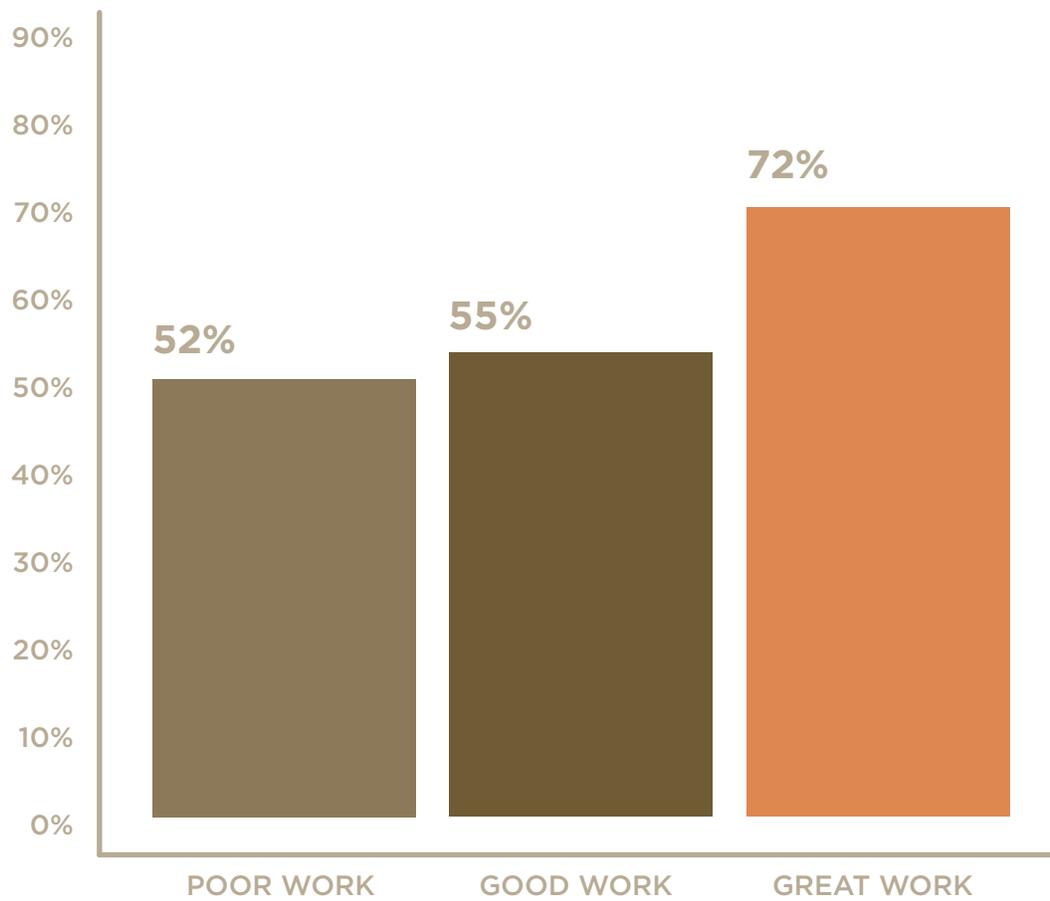|	POOR WORK	GOOD WORK	GREAT WORK
	52%	65%	88%
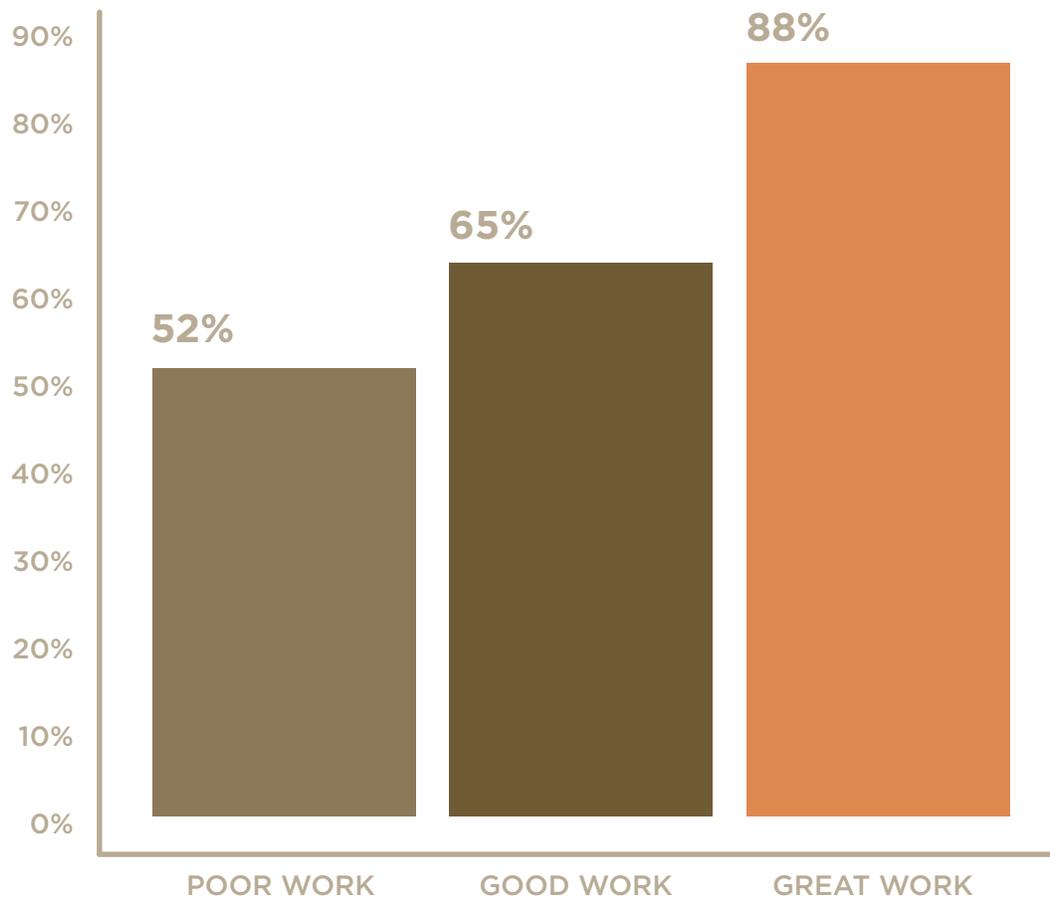
Nearly 9 out of every 10 instances of great work involved someone Asking the Right Question.

SEE FOR YOURSELF
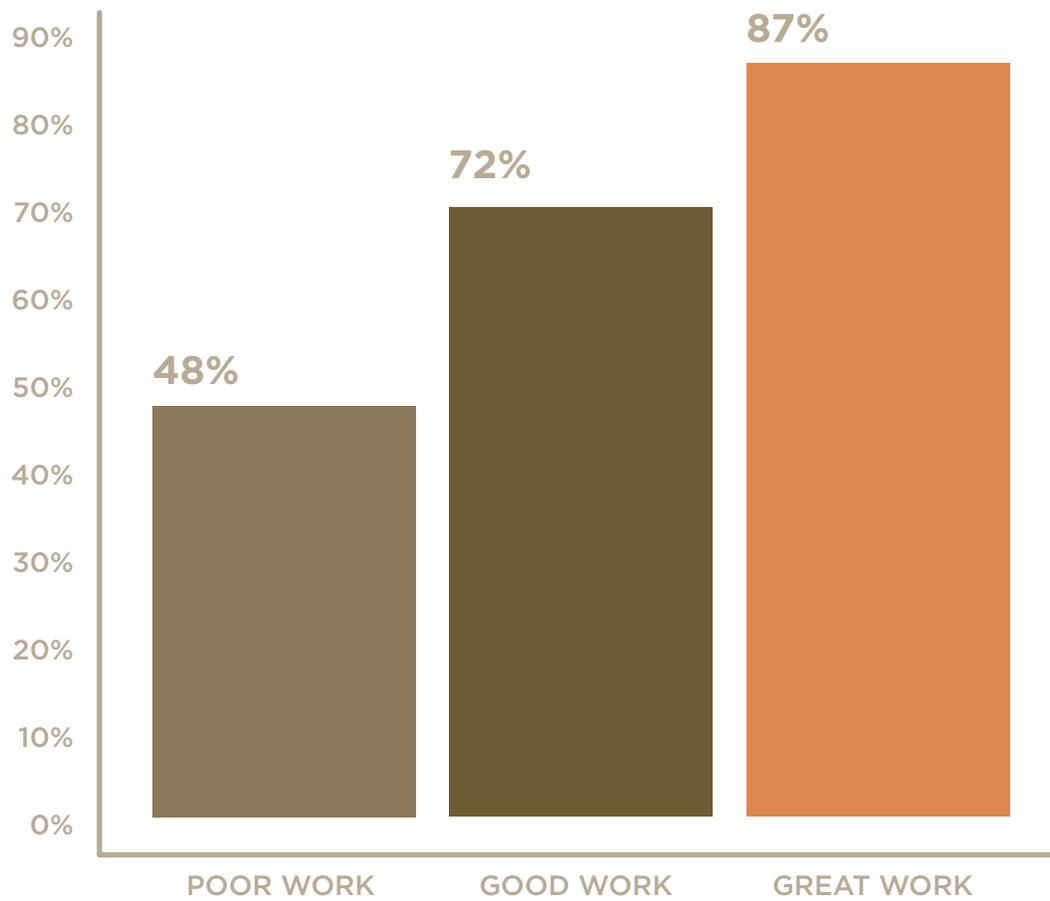
Nearly 9 out of every 10 instances of great work involved someone Seeing for Themselves what kind of changes or improvements might be loved by recipients of their work.

TALK TO YOUR OUTER CIRCLE

About 7 out of every 10 instances of great work involved people talking to others outside their usual team about the improvements that they were trying to make.

IMPROVE THE MIX
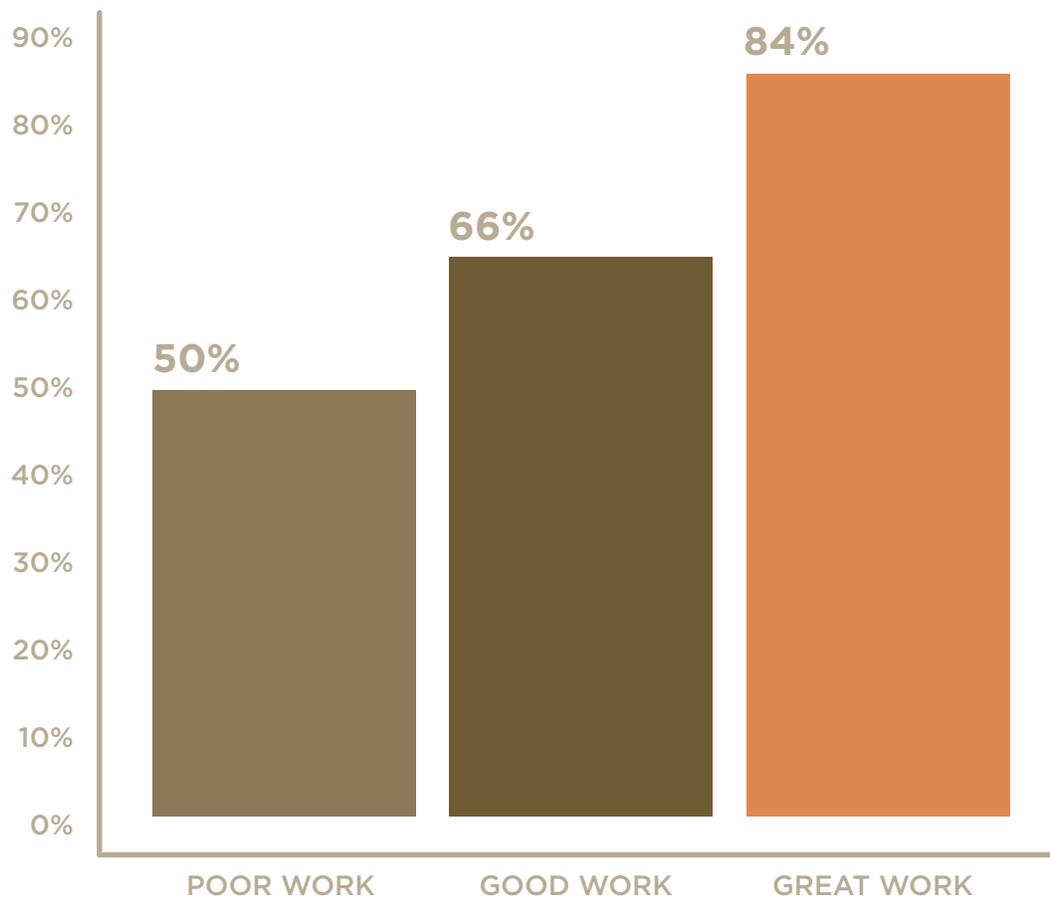
More than 8 out of every 10 instances of great work involved someone shaping and experimenting with ideas to make an improvement or add new value.

DELIVER THE DIFFERENCE

90%

76%

55%

POOR WORK	GOOD WORK	GREAT WORK
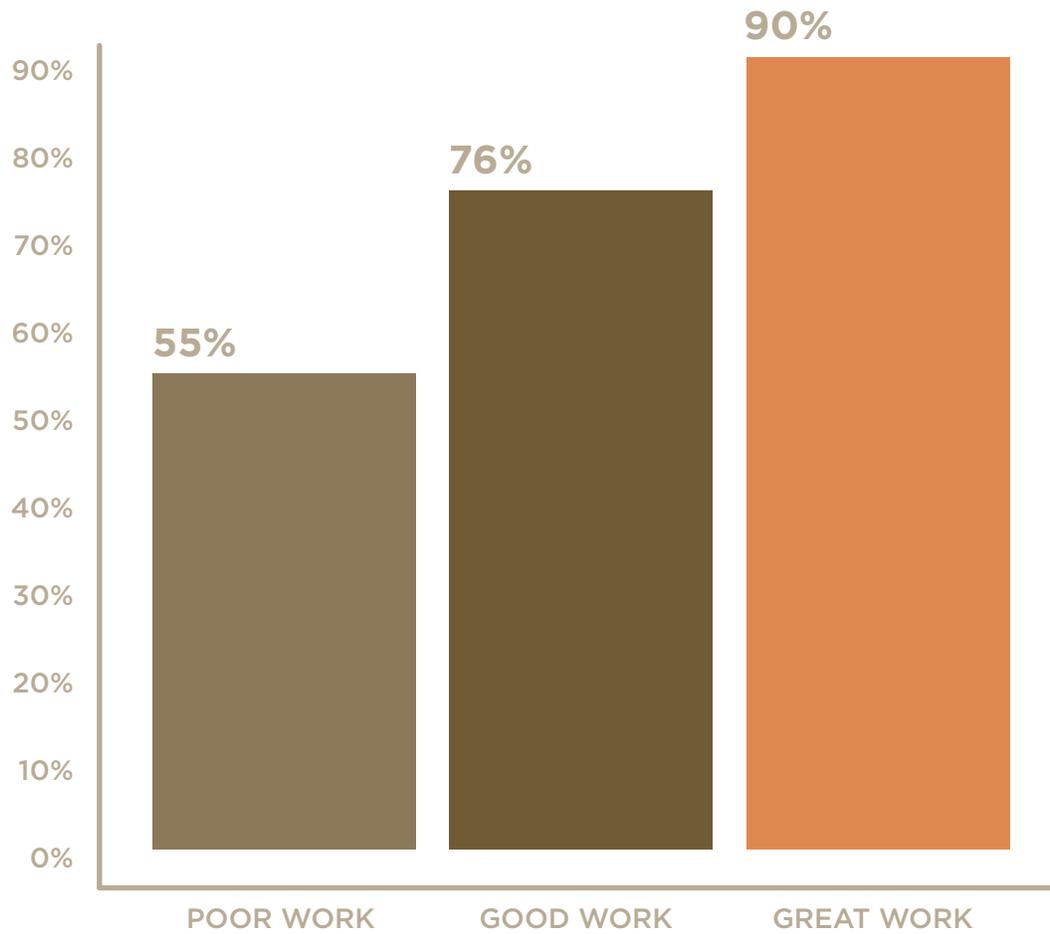
A full 9 out of every 10 instances of great work involved someone staying involved, toughing it out, and seeing the work through to a desired result.

AN EXPLANATION OF "EXPLAINED VARIANCE"

One of the most exciting numbers from the Forbes Insights survey is 35 percent, which is the explained variance of the five skills working together. That means that people who start practicing these five skills together can expect their supervisors to notice a 35 percent increase in their production of work that exceeds expectations.

For those unfamiliar with "explained variance," Dr. Jeff Thompson of Brigham Young University provides this clarification: "When we say one thing affects another thing (like receiving a gift makes me happier), there is virtually never a 100% correlation. For instance, if we give someone a box of chocolates, we might brighten a rather gloomy day, but we probably won't get that person from despair to euphoria. The reason is that, aside from the chocolates, there are likely millions of other variables at work that affect the recipient's mood. It might be raining. They may have just stubbed their toe, or lost their dog, or eaten a bad lunch. In the face of all of that, if the gift of chocolates makes them 5% happier than they were before, they will probably be really grateful."

The data in the Forbes Insights survey is trying to predict how 5 skills impact outcomes that are based on human perception—like someone saying, "That work really exceeded my expectations." There is no possible way to capture 100% of the variables that might explain such a perception. A supervisor may want to view the work objectively, but a million other thoughts and influences like, "That wasn't anything like the idea I had," "he forgot my birthday last month," and "I hate people who wear purple" creep in. Social scientists call that "noise." To account for that "noise," explained variance is the statistical percentage of causation that we establish between X and Y. If explained variance is 15%, it means that X accounts for 15% of changes that happen to Y.

The Great Work study suggests that the five skills working together can fully explain more than a third of something as subjective as "great work." In other words, employees who engage in these five skills can expect supervisors to notice a 35 percent increase in their production of work that exceeds expectations.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

The most qualitative component of research for Great Work consisted of more than 200 one-on-one interviews with people who were involved in great work that made a difference that was formally recognized. Extraordinary outcomes large and small in dozens of different industries all over the world were examined.

A wide range of workers—from receptionists, call center agents, janitors, and pharmacists to innovators—were interviewed. By design, the volume of interviews skewed toward everyday people who had made a difference others loved. Interviews took place in person and by telephone and lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to four hours. Conversations focused on the great work accomplished, what happened, how it happened, and why. The interviews were open-ended, allowing each great work story to unfold naturally.

Verbatim Comments from Great Work Interview Transcripts On the Nature of Great Work

"To do great work is to put your heart and soul into something. To not only do what you're told, but to put your stamp on something; to add a little extra; to have pride in your work."

"Work doesn't have to be drudgery. We don't have to wait around for something to happen. We can give ourselves the satisfaction of making something happen. This is fundamental to being human. We are all wired to do good."

"There's so much competition, we have to be different. And that's up to me. I make the difference."

"The idea of having created something, or having done something that is uniquely you, is what makes life worthwhile."

On Asking the Right Question

"Think about what would really impact those you serve and work for . . . and then 'backplan' to know what to do."

"I usually brainstorm each week. How can we do this? How can we get merchandise out and make it look great and not make a mess and not get in anyone's way? I pay close attention to how people react because sometimes you think something is amazing, but somebody else doesn't."

"I'm always considering options. Every time I talk to patients, I'm thinking, 'Would I do that for my mother?' If the answer is 'no,' then we are wasting that drug and we need to start over."

"The fun that you get out of doing something fun and unique and more than what people asked you to do ought to stimulate everybody."

"When I got the opportunity to manage the gift shop of a new hospital, I remembered all the months I spent in the hospital when my husband was

dying of cancer. The gift shop was an escape for me. It was my getaway. Now I had the opportunity to create something that would affect somebody else in the same situation."

On Seeing for Yourself
"No consumer would have ever said in a focus group: I want 1,000 songs in my pocket. That idea was based upon seeing consumer behavior and taking the next logical step."

"We always ask employees what they want from our wellness program, but we also look at the data. If we see lots of heart disease or diabetes or issues with cholesterol in our company, we try to focus there."

"We took a trip to an auto dealer—because they do some pretty fancy finishes and trims and user interface stuff. We also looked at high-end stereo equipment. The controls on our washing machines were inspired by all those things."

"My team of HR generalists and I work on the floor at least twice a month with our employees. We get in uniform and get on the floor with them, cooking, cashiering, working graveyard shifts. It helps to see what our people are going through."

"As a clinical pharmacist, I don't just look at the one thing we are treating. I treat the whole patient. . . . I always look at their labs and every other test. "

"If there's a design-related issue that makes assembly difficult, you've got to watch somebody doing it, and work the problem on the spot. Sending a picture or a voice mail doesn't work. You've got to be there."

"I saw this vision of what could be and I didn't know how I was going to get there, but I just went for it and things began to happen."

On Talking to Your Outer Circle

"It's been about going out and talking with people and asking, 'What do you think would work? How do you see this happening?'"

"We're all creative, but there's not any one of us that has all the answers. So it's important to involve different points of view in order to get the creative solutions you need."

"There is a very natural, very human fear in sharing one's ideas. And yet it seems to be the x-factor, the differentiating thing."

"So this guy from Disney came in and he just said: 'Dude, you need some people who bring in unconventional thinking and that sort of stuff. And there are some great places you can get it.'"

"Desperation creates inspiration. . . . So I went and talked to our auto physical damage team to understand what they were doing. Communication is my bias. I always try to emphasize conversations."

"I managed across 10 silos, and that many people are inherently just not

going to play nice together. So I had to basically build trust between them and me and amongst each other so that, together, we could invent some new ways to do things."

On Improving the Mix

"Most ideas aren't big grandiose ideas. They are little improvements."

"Any time you can take two things that people love—that they don't think can go together—and you somehow make them go together, you have a really great idea."

"We're a global company—but we don't always act that way. In this project, we were able to take designs of similar products in Brazil or China and kind of 'copy,' if you will, their designs to leverage our global expertise."

"I'm always a believer that there's a better way to do things."

"There is more than one way of doing things. Great work is about finding the unique path, the different approach, that will make a difference."

"I fill my mind with possibilities, and then just hook them together."

On Delivering the Difference

"We knew if we could just work through a few more problems, we were going to get there. Our team got labeled 'the dragon slayers' for the way we worked those issues."

"We were getting the paperwork together when we realized we were going to be zero landfill after today. But we decided to wait to make sure it was real. Each week would tick by and we were still zero landfill. So finally we felt comfortable announcing that we did it."

"There were so many people who thought what I was doing was a neat idea—in every corner of the world. But nobody had gone from the hobby stage to the commercial stage."

"We gain satisfaction from helping others and accomplishing something—we're wired that way. But we have to build or create something. We need to make things happen."

"You cannot learn anything unless you make a mistake. So what I tell my students is, if you make a mistake, the thing to do is to celebrate and think, 'how fascinating.'"

"The guy who was in charge of quality was just rabid on understanding what customers were saying and getting that info immediately back to the person who could do something about it."

Additional research and findings can be found in the book: *Great Work: How to Make a Difference People Love* and at greatwork.com.

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appreciate.

O.C. Tanner is the world leader at helping companies grow by appreciating people who do great work. Because celebrating great work inspires people to invent, to create, to discover. And when people are inspired, companies grow. Our performance awards, service awards, web-based recognition tools, and other incentive programs turn corporate goals into reality for more than 8,000 well-known customers worldwide.

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